Lisa Knopp

Still Life with Peaches

Objects of Desire

On the counter dividing my kitchen from my dining room is a wide straw basket brimming with bills, receipts, greeting cards, and newspaper clippings. Hooked over the rim of the basket is a dry turkey wishbone. To the right of the basket is a white saucer that holds a flat, elephant-shaped clay incense burner, a closed white book of matches, the stub of a stick of incense, and a curl of ash. In front of the basket and saucer are six peaches, each clefted, each more oblong than round; their yellow skins are touched with red, and each one looks ripe.

Though I listed the peaches last, they're probably what you'd notice first if you saw this scene or the visual representation of it that I would make if I could paint or sketch. If I positioned a person—say, my daughter—on the other side of the counter so you could see her dark, wild hair, her bright brown eyes, and her lean form, she would command your attention and my painting would be a portrait instead of a still life.

The common, ordinary domestic objects in some still lifes look deliberately, even elaborately, posed. Those in others look as if they were chanced upon—"found" scenes the artists saw as worthy of aesthetic consideration. Because fresh ripe fruit has been a staple of this genre since the earliest expressions of the form, I immediately recognized the peaches on my kitchen counter as fitting for a still life. But, too, the peaches were the center of my attention because in so many ways I'd invested them with significance. The other objects in the scene had been relatively inconsequential, attracting my attention only if I needed to dig through the basket to find a receipt, or if company was coming and I wanted my house to smell like sandalwood instead of stir fry, or if a situation had arisen that called for wishes as well as prayers. Yet, once I recognized the peaches as the focal point of an imagined painting and began writing an essay about it, I elevated the status of everything else from the quotidian to the exceptional.

I move the peaches so that there is a clump of four in front of the basket and two to the right. I try other combinations—three and three, two and four, one and five. For my taste, the less contrived and more natural the presentation the better. But at this point, natural is no longer possible. I put the peaches in a bowl. Then I take them out in two handfuls, as I might if I'd just returned from the grocery store with a bag of fruit, and set them on the counter in two clumps about six inches apart: a contrived natural. I turn some of them over so that they are showing their pale red or deep red sides. Now, I'd have a range of colors to work with, if I were painting this scene. No matter how I position the peaches, everything in this grouping appears to be waiting, held in the perpetual present.

If, in still life, the selection of objects is fundamental, it's worth my while to consider what else I could have placed on the counter as an object for my imagined painting. Apples instead of peaches, for instance. An apple is a patient and forgiving fruit, willing to keep in the bottom of the refrigerator for weeks, while a peach soon wrinkles and becomes rubbery or brown and mealy. An apple picked at the heart of the harvest season speaks to me of humility and hardiness, a ripe peach of desire and fragility. I've sometimes had more fresh apples than I could eat, but never enough fresh peaches.

Next to the delicate, perishable peaches I could place a geode, an orb that will endure for many millennia. The exterior is plain, bumpy, and gray-brown. But if it is cut the hollow interior shows itself to be lined with dazzling pink, purple, white, or amber. This juxtaposition might lead you to meditate on permanence and immutability, or on other interiors, both those that are revealed and those that are not. So, too, if I allowed a fly to rest on one of the peaches or included one pocked with peach-scab infection. First you'd see the chosen object; then you'd notice the signs of decay, a reminder of the energetic forces working beneath the skin of any living or recently living organism. This might intensify your longing to be fully present not only to the still life, but to whatever else you're experiencing at the moment—the breeze through the open window, the cat brushing against your ankle, the rattle and grind of a garbage truck, the imagined scent and taste of peaches.

If I were to cut one of the peaches in half and position it so that you could see the deeply sculpted red-brown seed husk, from which red streaks radiate into the yellow flesh, the scene would become even more striking. The kind of saucer on which I placed the cut peach would influence your perception of the scene: A shiny, black, octagonal plate? Beige stoneware graced with a golden sheaf of wheat? Tivoli china embellished with a border of delicate pink roses and blue shells and with a gold-edged rim? A red, white, and blue paper plate?

My choice could nudge my still life a little closer to cultural or anthropological record or to an expression of my social position—yet I bought all but the paper plates at yard sales, paying more for the black plates that I bought from a farm woman who purchased them new at Wal-Mart than I did for the set of china I bought from a woman in her mid-fifties who had recently lost her home, had been living with her daughter for the past several months, and then, for reasons she did not explain, was being asked to leave. I was so moved by her story that I paid her more than she was asking for the china, though not what it was worth. A still life can't convey any of this—nothing about that woman's daughter, nothing about mine.

Equivalent

In front of the basket is a clump of three peaches, overlapping so that you see only the one in front, the one with the stem, in its entirety; to the left of the basket are three peaches almost in a row, with little space between them. Each is yellow-skinned and ruddy. Ravines and glowing hills. Clefts in the flesh and blushing cheeks. The weave in the basket forms zigzagging rows stacked atop each other. The sharp corner of a pink envelope juts above the curved rim of the basket. The wishbone, light, greasy, yet dry, with a chunk of gristle clinging to the tip, balances on the rim. Afternoon light filters in from the northern window to the left of the arrangement. Faint shadows. An earthy yet ethereal fragrance. Such stillness.

This last is what I most want to capture on paper.

Realism, with its emphasis on an accurate, precisely detailed, unembellished representation of the subject, is a genre of painting that rarely appeals to me. Georgia O'Keeffe, a painter of rather surreal still lifes featuring weathered bones, lurid flowers, and pearly seashells, famously said, "Nothing is less real than realism. Details are confusing. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis that we get at the meaning of things." Against the wall on the same counter as the peaches are an electric can opener and a stereo that I've chosen not to include in my still life.

It wasn't just meaning that O'Keeffe was after, but feeling. In a letter she drafted in 1937 in response to what she judged to be the incorrect conclusions some critics had reached about her work, she said, "Even if I could put down accurately certain things that I saw & enjoyed it would not give the observer the kind of feeling the object gave me—I had to create an equivalent for what I felt about what I was looking at—not copy it."

I might paint the equivalent of what I felt when I viewed my still life with peaches as shimmering and impressionistic, or monochromatic and cubist, or chalky and abstract. Even so, I'd want it to be representational enough that people would recognize the objects not only as peaches, but as desirable ones at that, and my kitchen would be judged a humble, familiar place.

The Absence of Narrative

Perhaps the oldest still life with peaches is a fresco from the House of Red Deers, a villa in the Roman village of Herculaneum, destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. *Peaches and Glass Jar* is a curious painting. All the objects in it are positioned on shelves—a convention of Roman still lifes. Three green peaches are poised on the upper shelf; on the lower shelf are two green peaches and a water-filled carafe, a weird transparency within a transparency. The peaches don't seem at rest, and one is on the verge of falling off the top shelf. The carafe also seems unsettled, its curves out of whack, almost giving it the appearance of movement. A bowed twig with eight dark green leaves leans against the shelves, crossing the entire painting, bottom to top. Four of the peaches are still attached to it. Someone has taken a bite out of one detached peach, revealing the rust-colored pit, and laid the chunk on the shelf next to it, probably because the fruit was too green and unyielding to be edible.

The arrangement of the objects seems contrived, yet their weightiness is evenly distributed and the curved, diagonal sweep of the peach branch contrasts nicely with the horizontal shelves. What I find peculiar are the proportions: the peaches are almost as big as the carafe, which is composed of misshapen ovals. But in spite of these distortions, I enjoy this painting simply because the side-by-side shades of rust and lime green please me.

Some still lifes are visual sermons, thick with religious and allegorical symbolism. *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* by the Dutch painter Harmen Steenwijck features two slightly open books, traditional symbols of human knowledge; several musical instruments, symbols of sensory pleasures; a Japanese sword and a conch—rare items in early-seventeenth-century Holland, and so symbols of wealth; a chronometer, an extinguished lamp, and, near the center of the arrangement, a human skull—all symbols of the fleetingness of human life. There is no explicit narrative here, yet for those who can decode the iconography the scene is saturated with meaning. In the case of *Peaches and a Glass Jar*, the only narrative or meaning I can extract, slight though it is, concerns the rejected bite of peach. But if we look beyond the frame, there is that paradoxical story about the eruption of a volcano whose molten lava both destroyed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum and preserved slices of Roman life.

Typically, when viewing a still life, one has no expectation of a story. In the relative absence of narrative, the things that matter are shape, hue, texture, placement, and overlap of objects; the structure of negative space; the juxtaposition of tall and short, curved and angled, bright and dark. Whenever viewing my imagined still life with peaches, I ease myself into a state that the poet Mark Doty calls "agenda-less alertness," above or beneath words, names, analysis, and reflection. There I experience nothing but the physicality of the six peaches, the basket of bills, the incense burner and curl of ash, the wishbone, the afternoon light, and myself as observer.

Like Salt or Love

Still, I love the pressure to turn a cohesive setting of objects—or a connected sequence of events—and the reflections they inspire into a narrative, a form and movement that people easily recognize because it's ancient and natural and, so, something we crave, like salt or love. A good story will contextualize these peaches, deepen your interest in them, explain why I wanted to create a painting or essay to preserve them, and why, though ripe and sweet, they were so hard to eat.

The story behind my still life begins with a walk. Even before I took the first step of that walk, I knew that I would remember it the rest of my life.

On Friday, 17 August 2012, I drove the sixty miles between my home in Lincoln and the airport in Omaha with my daughter Meredith, her violin, and her two enormous suitcases. She was catching a plane that morning to New York City, where she would study violin as a graduate student at a music conservatory. Since her dream had always been to live in that wild and alluring city, I suspected that she'd remain there after she graduated. This was the day that I'd dreaded ever since I understood, really understood, that eventually she would leave not only our home but this part of the country.

Meredith and I arrived in Omaha earlier than expected. Rather than spend more time at the airport than we had to, we decided to walk. I parked behind an old, family-owned restaurant where she and I had eaten several times—thick homemade soups, brownies the size of shingles, and such a wide selection of pie (strawberry, sweet potato, pecan, sour cream raisin, banana cream, rhubarb, lemon meringue, chocolate, apple, peach) that I often had to ask someone to help me choose. On at least a few occasions, Meredith and I had walked in an old, hilly neighborhood north of the restaurant. It was a fitting place for her last walk in Nebraska as a Nebraska resident.

Just a few blocks from the restaurant we came upon a peach tree. The branches hanging over the backyard privacy fence were bent low with the weight of the fruit; golden peaches had fallen on the grass and sidewalk. How could anyone let such beautiful fruit go to waste? Some peaches were soft, bruised, or wormy, but most were unblemished and at or near their prime. We decided that on our way back to the car we'd gather some of the fruit that had fallen on the grass between the sidewalk and the curb.

As we walked those old hills, we chatted about the new lives that we were both entering, lives that would be filled more with others than with each other. We had cried on the drive to Omaha, heaping a soggy pile of Kleenexes on the floorboard as we confessed our fears about what lay ahead and our deep gratitude for each other. On the walk, Meredith sparkled with excitement about all the people she was going to meet, some of whom would offer opportunity, friendship, love; and we speculated about the mystifying interplay of genes, hard work, and chance that would decide her fate . . . and mine. I was certain that a bright and fulfilling personal and professional life awaited her. But because the voids created by the loss or absence of loved ones had become harder to fill as I've aged, I was less optimistic about my own prospects. My hopes for myself were minimal: I simply wanted to get through Meredith's departure and the hard days that followed without coming undone.

On the way back to the car, we stopped at the tree and gathered as many peaches as we could fit into the green ball cap Meredith had worn on our walk, plus a few more that I carried. She set the fruit-filled cap on the floorboard on the passenger side of the car; then, before we went into the airport, she grabbed two of the peaches to eat in the air somewhere between Omaha and New York.

Once inside, we talked and laughed and wept. The biggest chunk of our talk was about my getting a haircut, a seemingly silly thing to concern ourselves with on such a momentous day, except that I'd worn a waist-length braid for decades and now I was wild to be gone with it. We talked about where I should get it cut and by whom, how much (not all of it, though a good nine inches), and why. (Meredith's departure marked the end of one era and the beginning of a new one in my life, and I wanted to look as well as feel different.) I became a little nauseous and giddy at the thought of walking into Iasan & Sebastian Salon with my braid and leaving without it.

We stood in the line for airport security until I was forbidden to go any farther with Meredith. When she emerged at the other end of the checkpoint, she turned, blew kisses, and disappeared. Because I expected this moment of physical separation to be devastating and didn't want to be in a crowded airport when it hit, I had planned to make a hurried exit. But instead of feeling grief-stricken or numb or flooded with love or pride or self-pity, I felt a surprising surge of lightness and joy. This wasn't the response I'd anticipated, and for a moment I felt guilty, but then I understood. For almost twenty-eight years I'd mothered my two children, putting them at or near the center of almost everything, and now the job was done . . . or, more likely, was becoming something else. But at that moment, I was nobody's mother. Life opened up before me in ways that delighted and then frightened me. Soon I would cut my hair, but beyond that I didn't know what I'd do with myself or how I'd live in the newly opened spaces.

When I returned to my car and opened the door, I smelled the peaches. Then I saw them in the bowl of the hat that Meredith had left behind, and for the first of what would be many times I remembered the peach tree, the hills north of the restaurant, our glimpses into the future, and how acutely aware I'd been on our walk of the passage of time . . . one minute less with Meredith at this stage of our lives . . . one minute less before the next stage began. After this tumble of images, I imagined entering my house, now absent of my daughter's presence, but with signs of her everywhere—the sheets she'd slept on the past several nights; the towel she'd used to dry herself after her shower the night before; her coffee mug in the sink; her old sandals on the dining room floor; a note jotted on the back of a tea bag wrapper and left on the stove: "Call me.

Back at 2:15." I felt a pang of . . . sadness? regret? yearning? Then the lightness and joy returned. I got in the car, picked out a couple of peaches to eat, and headed home.

Nothing in the still life on my kitchen counter suggests this story behind the peaches, my complicated feelings, or how sacramental it was to eat that fruit, as if I were taking my daughter's departure into my body with each delicious bite. For all the viewer of my still life knows, I bought the peaches at Super Saver for the purpose of arranging a still life, or I harvested them from a tree that grows in my backyard—there is no such tree, though I've long dreamed of having a small peach orchard—or the man that I'd been seeing for a couple of months before and several after Meredith's departure (and whose presence made her leaving easier to bear, a man who shared the bounty of his garden and orchard with me) brought those peaches and left them on the counter in a rather bell-shaped basket darkened with use, a basket so right for including in a still life. There's a story there, too: if the peaches he'd brought were the ones I'd chosen for my imagined still life and the subject of this essay, the story of his distracting, frustrating, yet enlivening presence would be primary and that of my daughter's departure secondary.

The uncracked wishbone from last Thanksgiving that teeters on the edge of the basket with the slightest disturbance also bears a story. When I asked Meredith to make a wish and pull, she refused. "You don't know what you're messing with when you wish on something," she said. Though I don't know how wishing, praying, cursing, or spell-casting work, I don't doubt their power. Since Meredith issued that warning, I haven't been able to pull the wishbone, nor can I throw it away.

Now that you know this story about her refusal to call forth a wish to enact the ritual with the physical object that would empower her intention, you might see the intact wishbone and its untapped potential as the focal point of the scene. You might, in fact, prefer that I call the scene "Still Life with Wishbone" instead of "Still Life with Peaches." But I'm not ready to tell a story about the powers and dangers of wishing.

Finally, there's an old story about innocence and desire that this still life recalls for me. When I was a child, I thought that all peaches came from tin cans and looked either like goldfish or like turtles. I preferred the turtles, even though they scooted across my plate when I tried to cut them with a fork. Then, I didn't know that my enjoyment of eating uniformly golden-orange, skinless, syrupy slices and halves would be so different from the pleasure I'd one day receive when biting through the red and yellow skin of a fresh peach, velvety as a horse's muzzle . . . biting into the flesh, with its lovely mix of sweet and acid, pulling the last bits of peach meat from the husk, cracking the husk open, and holding the smooth tan seed on my tongue.

Negative Space

After Virginia Woolf heard her sister Vanessa Bell and their friend and art critic Roger Fry talk about *Les Pommes*, a Cezanne still life, she asked in her diary, "What can 6 apples *not* be?" That's easy. Six peaches. Yet, I wonder if Bell and Fry had so analyzed the placement and the lovely tonal harmonies of the apples in Cezanne's still life that what Woolf had posed was a question asking for more than an easy answer, more than analysis, more than words. Perhaps Woolf was thinking of the space between and around the apples that shapes, identifies, and balances. Like the space between words and musical notes, it is the silent, still place where the mind can rest.

Banishment and Return

I find still life paintings alluring and repelling, consoling and alienating. Take Alice Neel's S*till Life Spring Lake* (1969). On a table top in the lower center of the painting sit a brown lidless crockery jar and eight pieces of golden fruit—five to the viewer's right of the jar and three to the left. (Peaches? Apples? Pears? Golden plums? Apricots?—I could make a case for each.) You can see the entirety of the brown tabletop—a brown that contains patches of peach, green, and blue—and the cutlery drawer in the white table frame, but you can't see the legs. A curved, white, spoke-back chair facing the viewer is pushed in close to the table. In the distance you see the middle section of a narrow white refrigerato**r,** and to the right the bottom of a wooden door painted a pale, chalky blue with recessed panels edged in gold. To the left of the refrigerator is an open doorway; beyond that are an orange floor and a cane-bottom chair pushed against a peach-colored wall. Because of the limited, downward-angled perspective, I feel as if I'm bending over to peer at this scene. I want to stand up and see what is closed off to me: the top of the refrigerator front, where there might be a recipe torn from a magazine or someone's to-do list held to it by magnets; the rest of the wooden door where there might be a pane of glass in the top half, through which I could see Spring Lake. I want to sit at the table, look into the brown crock and see what's within. (Cookies? Honey? Cobwebs? Pennies?) I want to check the golden fruit, touched with red and green, for ripeness. But nothing in this painting invites me to pull out the chair and sit down. Could I ever feel at home in such an unwelcoming place?

The attraction and repulsion I feel when viewing a still life speaks of the deep intentions of this genre. Art historian Norman Bryson, in his study of the eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, says that still life, on one hand, establishes the subject "as a reality that is beyond all doubt and that occupies the position of centre with regard to everything else." On the other hand, "the things of the world"—the golden fruit, the brown crock, and the spoke-backed chair, things that we'd consider marginal or complementary if we saw them in a portrait—"appear as if they have no living bond with this watchful subject locked up inside the self." This rift between the beholder and the beheld explains the contradictory impulses I feel when I look at this painting: I find the scene in Neel's still life beautiful and desirable, and so I want to enter it, yet I find the scene in Neel's still life sealed off, not just to me but to all human life. Because there's a barrier that keeps me from entering the place where I'd like to be, I'm uneasy and want to look away.

Is the unsettling sense of exile I feel when viewing a still life owing to the purported absence of narrative or to the room seeming to have been emptied of narrative? The difference is crucial. *Absence* means that something is lacking or not present, perhaps never existed. To be *emptied* means that once something was there, but it has since been purged, erased, drained, deleted, ripped out, or carried away. I don't believe that a *complete* lack of narrative is possible. Depictions of ripe fruit, fruit that was once green and will soon spoil and rot, suggest a fundamental narrative. So I must qualify my use of these terms: narrative is *relatively* absent in a still-life painting; the painting has been emptied of all but the subtlest of narratives.

In truth, a still life suggests a profound story about subject-object relations. Bryson says that the genre not only addresses the experience of the solitary, isolated subject gazing out at an objectified field from which he or she has been removed or barred entrance, but it also addresses the subject as one who is part of "a vast preceding cultural community," and so is far from alone. The awareness that a single viewer is one of the countless many who have seen peaches as a source of both of sustenance and beauty redefines the subject-object relation and, according to Bryson, *pulls* the cold, objectified outer world back toward the subject. However, I discern a different return movement. When I take the place not of a solitary, isolated beholder but as part of the multitude gathered before a still life painting, the scene from which I had been exiled *beckons* me to enter it. That, to my mind, is the allure of still life.

"Banishment" and "return" is what Bryson calls this movement, which resonates for me because the dominant story in my life has been that of seeking and creating hearth and home, of *being at home*—and now that my son and daughter have made their own homes, I feel I've lost or relinquished so much of what I once considered essential.

Questions claim me: Should I try to return to home as I once knew it? Should I go in search of a new and different kind of home? Should I not only learn to be content with my homelessness but see it as a blessing and sell off my house, furniture, books, and china until I'm light enough that I can go where the wind or my whims carry me? Should I find home in other people's homes? Should I cultivate the ability to see home both everywhere and nowhere?

When I returned "home" from taking Meredith to the airport and her new life, I set the peaches on the counter and put her hat in the closet. Then I turned around and saw my living room, dining room, and kitchen as if for the first time. Even though I knew the history of the objects in these rooms and their significance to me, at that moment they were not my things and this was not my home. I might as well have just entered a train station in a foreign country.

The first time I felt exiled from my own home was over twenty-five years ago when my son Ian was two. One Sunday evening while we were playing at the park, I noticed that he was limping. The next day he refused to walk and had reverted to crawling. The next day, he was so feverish and listless that I stayed home from work so I could take him to the doctor. Over the next two days several doctors, including a surgeon, examined Ian. Blood tests and X-rays revealed that he had an infection in his left thigh bone, an old-fashioned disease from which people used to die or lose limbs or become permanently crippled. Ian's was the first case of osteomyelitis in a child that any of the medical staff at Iowa Lutheran Hospital had ever seen.

Once Ian was in the care of the pediatric nurses at the hospital, I drove to my rented duplex in south Des Moines to take a shower and pack some food and clothes. When I walked into my living room, I was stunned by what I saw: my son's blue pajamas where I'd left them after I'd dressed him that morning; the rocking chair with a blanket draped over the arm because I'd held and rocked him before we left; his toys where he'd last played with them, including a fire truck near the front door and an orange crayon near the television. So much in my life that I thought was stable had been overthrown that day by the gravity of his illness. Yet here were our objects, just where we had left them. They had been his, mine, ours—and now they weren't ours because their familiar everydayness was gone. I felt spit out by the stillness, left broken and forsaken in a room I barely recognized. I realized that if my son died I could not continue living in this scene, in this duplex, in this neighborhood, in this city, where I'd be reminded of his presence and absence by such common details as my old rocking chair and every orange crayon. I could not reclaim these objects I had known from before the split that occurred that day because to do so would have meant ignoring or denying what we'd been through—the surgeon's initial hunch that a tumor was the problem, learning of the extent of the damage to the femur and the likelihood of surgeries in the future to correct it, my musings about life without Ian and about who I'd be if I were no longer his mother.

I decided that if Ian never came home again, I'd quit my high school teaching position and move to Madison, Wisconsin, or Albuquerque, New Mexico, to some pleasant place that had no connection to Ian. There, I would pursue a PhD in English at the local university so that I could learn to write essays and teach adults. Or perhaps I'd enroll in a vocational school and learn the locksmithing trade, so I could work for myself instead of someone else and because I loved the metaphors associated with locks and keys. I'd make new friends and learn to consume new things in my efforts to fill in or at least cordon off the treacherous hole in my life that Ian's absence would create.

At first, I found this progression in my thinking disturbing. How could I stand here and calmly plan a life without my son? But then I found it restorative, in part because it demanded that I be exquisitely aware of how much he meant to me and of the ways his presence had changed me, something I seldom thought about as I rushed around in the morning getting him ready for the babysitter and me for work, or as I crammed in as much paper grading, grocery shopping, class preparation, laundry, housecleaning, and "quality time" with Ian as I could on the weekends. Being restored in that way made me able to become present again to my living room, to my home, and to my life in this place.

After experiencing this different kind of movement—from banishment to return—caused by my view of the seemingly abandoned objects in my living room, I was still: *still* as in "not moving," "free of sound," or "free from disturbance"; and *still* as in "yet," "more," or "nevertheless."

Still life. Calm, quiet, and motionless, yet alive and ripe with possibilities.

After two weeks in the hospital and six weeks with nurses who came to our home or the babysitter's home every six hours to inject strong antibiotics through a tube surgically implanted into Ian's chest, the bone infection was gone and his recovery complete. At some point, I slipped back into the everyday vision of my living room, paying attention to the toys, furnishings, books, plants, and knickknacks only when I needed them.

Likewise, now that Meredith and I have found ways to stay deeply, closely in touch through frequent telephone calls and my visits to her home in New York City, I rarely notice the basket, wishbone, and incense burner on my kitchen counter, or consider that my counter once held peaches we gathered on an unforgettable walk, or dwell on that final reconciling act of consuming the peaches.

Next year at this time, there will be peaches on my counter—of that I am sure—but I don't know where they will come from, whether they will be sweet or tart, whether I will find them worthy of a still life, or what reflections they may provoke. Other losses or the anticipation of losses will beckon me to reenact the story of banishment and return.

While I ate the peaches that Meredith and I had gathered, I did so with sadness and regret because, as I consumed each one, I realized I was farther and farther from the day when I had gathered them with my soon-to-be-leaving, on-the-brink-of-so-much daughter. But I also ate them with pleasure—golden, fragrant, and sweet.

Works Cited

Bryson, Norman. "Chardin and the Text of Still Life," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2, Winter 1989: 227–52.

O'Keeffe, Georgia. "I Can't Sing, So I Paint! Says Ultra Realistic Artist; Art is Not Photography—It Is Expression of Inner Life!: Miss O'Keeffe Explains Subjective Aspect of Her Work," *New York Sun*, 5 December 1922, quoted in Jonathan Stuhlman, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Circling around Abstraction.* Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, 2007, p. 22.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell. vol. I. London: Hogarth Press, 1977, 140–41.